

OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE 27TH IN BATTLE



TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1919

Gen. O'Ryan, While in France, Ordered It Written for The Evening World

Was Mysteriously "Lost," and It Is Here-with Printed for the First Time—The 27th Lived Up to the Best Traditions of New York Soldiers in the Terrific Fighting at the Hindenburg Line.

The Evening World herewith presents Major Gen. O'Ryan's review of the engagements of the 27th Division—from Mount Kemmel to the Hindenburg line—it was prepared soon after the division had been withdrawn from the line to Montfort. The Evening World called Gen. O'Ryan that all New York was waiting for the details. Under Gen. O'Ryan's direction and with his approval the review was prepared, but it was lost on the cables. It is printed just as it was written in December, 1918.

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"MEN of the 27th Division will have stories more thrilling than those of fiction to tell when they arrive home among their friends in New York and adjoining States. There is nothing in Robert Louis Stevenson, in Balzac, or even Dumas, which can touch the real experiences through which these city boys and country boys have passed. The records of the division show that its men have fought in three big battles, three engagements and two minor actions.

The division had traditions before sailing for France, and these have been magnificently sustained and many new successes have been achieved which will place the division among the foremost in the history of American fighting units. It was the first division to fight on Belgium soil. Together with the 30th American Division, it formed the 2d Corps and was brigaded with the British in June, 1918.

"His first experience in the line was a trying one for young troops. It was placed in the reserve line known as the East Poperinghe line, behind Dickebusch Lake, in Belgium, and at a time when it was expected that the group of armies under Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria intended making a determined drive against the northern part of the Lys salient, with the Channel ports as their objectives. At that time it was felt that the British holding the front line would be unable to stand the shock of such an assault and that the deluge of Germans would roll up to the East Poperinghe line. There, however, it would stop. Orders were that the enemy must be stopped at all costs. This situation was changed, however, during the great German drive toward Chateau-Thierry, which at first met with such success that the Germans postponed attacking in Flanders in order to exploit to the full their southern drive. As the world knows, the Germans were driven back, and these conditions necessitated the withdrawal of a part of Prince Rupprecht's group of armies for service in the south, and the drive to the sea was abandoned.

"Immediately upon this information being received through prisoners and captured documents the 27th Division was selected to attack and capture Mount Kemmel. There was confi-

in three days and nights the 27th Division reversed this condition of affairs with such marked aggressiveness that the enemy put opposite a number of new divisions, among which was the 8th German Division, considered one of the finest in the German Army. This crack organization of the enemy's army immediately showed its mettle by making a raid in broad daylight behind a moving curtain of steel. The barrage fell upon the leading elements of the 10th Infantry, formerly the old 7th of New York, but did not in the least demoralize or disturb the spirit and determination of the men. The raid was a failure. The men of the 27th Division met their assailants, who attacked with bombs, rifles and knives. So fierce was the fighting that some squads of the 10th were almost entirely wiped out, but not one prisoner was taken by the enemy. The enemy

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Looping the Loop in a Lorry OR THE TRAIL OF THE 27TH, "THE NEW YORK DIVISION," THROUGH FRANCE AND BELGIUM May 30th, 1918—Feb. 26th, 1919

This graphic chart of the progress of the 27th Division from its port of disembarkation, St. Nazaire, through its victories at Mount Kemmel, Dickebusch and the breach of the Hindenburg line, and its return to the coast to embark for home again at Brest, is done by Private Robert Howe Jr., of the Headquarters Detachment. Beginning at the lower left hand corner, the picture-travelogue commemorates the third of the submarine attacks on the vessels carrying over the division, May 29, 1918, in sight of Belle Isle, at the very entrance of St. Nazaire's locked-in harbor.

Headquarters moved to St. Riquier immediately, and from that town the first ten-day period of training was directed. Private Howe's sketch of the church with the twin towers, the Church in which Jeanne d'Arc was imprisoned, is not a bit less accurate because he had an opportunity to study it from an airplane, taking his first lessons in observation. After a few days at Escarbotin, Major Gen. O'Ryan moved to Beauval, employing the chariot with high wheels and thick bumpers which will be known to 2,000,000-odd Americans until they die as "40 hommes—a chevaux"—the French box car. The Boche planes had found the whereabouts of the 27th Division by this time, and here began an effort to blow Gen. O'Ryan and his staff off the map which did not relax until the armistice was signed. The only victims of the first attack were seventeen horses.

From Beauval the division sent its first men to the front lines for training and seasoning. More were sent from Nieuilet, near St. Omer, where many of the men celebrated July 4. Fritz joined in the Nieuilet celebration by dropping a bomb, which injured seven machine gunners. At Oudezele the bombs happened every night. One of them, which was a dud, dropped on the hut of "G2," otherwise known as the Intelligence Section, and caused Private Robert Howe Jr., a rising young artist, and his immediate commanding officer to hasten out into the dark and recline in a ditch for several hours. Besides the bombs, the division was visited here by King George V. and Elsie Janis. King George reviewed the troops and the troops reviewed Miss Janis.

The plans for the assault on Mount Kemmel were made in this town. From this battle the division moved on to Douglas Camp, a cantonment hidden in the trees, to prepare for the Dickebusch action, after which the 27th went back for a rest before taking the Hindenburg line apart and finding out what made it tick. Headquarters rested in a chateau at

Beauquesne in which Joffre and his staff planned the Battle of the Marne and in which was a book registering the visits of the Kings of England and Belgium, and Queens, and Field Marshals, "n' everything." There was room for 500 horses in the stable adjoining.

At Bois de Buire the attack on the Hindenburg line was laid out and Major Gen. O'Ryan, with a few of his staff, went toward St. Emille Quarry, which Private Howe, not having seen, does not attempt to picture. At Joncourt, which German bombs had laid waste and where the Battle of St. Souplet was planned, the German airmen were very busy. Headquarters moved on to Busigny, where the enemy artillery had the range so nicely that it shelled various blocks of the town with the utmost precision, but obligingly timing the bombardment so that it was always possible for the New Yorkers to move into a quiet block in plenty of time to keep out of trouble. Before the German time schedule was sufficiently understood, however, a shell landed in the big house in the picture and wounded Major Austin and nine of his men on the floor above that on which Major Gen. O'Ryan was consulting with his staff.

With a lot of its prisoners to do chores, the division moved down to Corbie, ten miles from Amiens, to listen to rumors about going home, which followed right along to the debarkation area at Montfort. And then—oh, joy! oh, boy!—came the last of the O'Ryan victories, the success of the campaign to get the New York division home just as quick as it could march aboard the boats. The chateau of the Count de Nicolai at Montfort was where Gen. O'Ryan entertained Gen. Pershing and Senator Wadsworth before the division hit the trail for Brest, crossing its victory-bound trail from St. Nazaire.

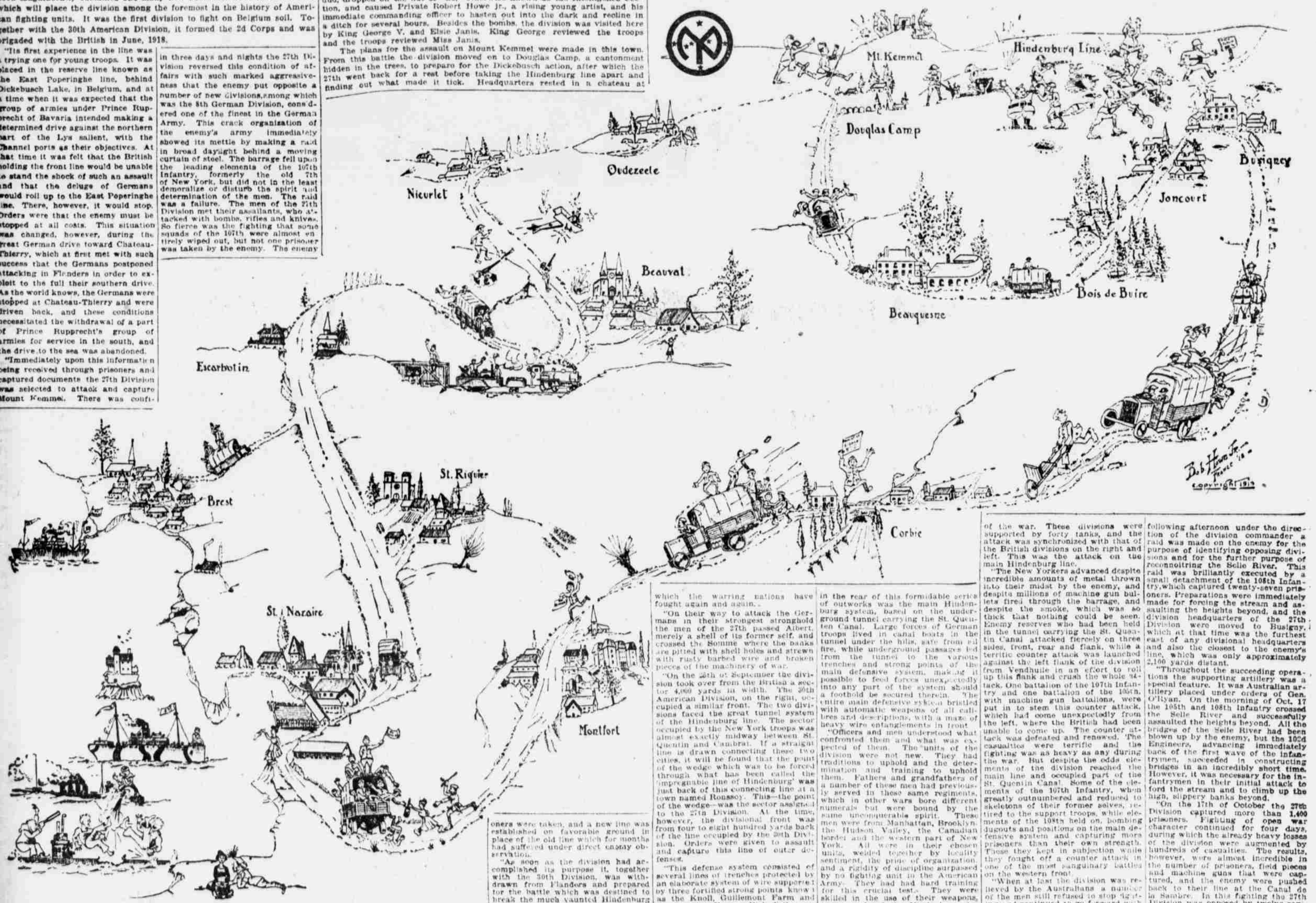
TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1919

New York Boys Outfought and Outgamed Germans Against Big Odds.

Smashed Hindenburg Line, Although at One Time They Had Opposed to Them Twelve Regiments From Four German Divisions—In 25 Days They Advanced 13 Miles and Took 6,000 Prisoners.

Infantry, behind a barrage of great intensity, made the first attack. Throughout the day and the night the 106th Infantry and the Germans who garrisoned the inverted fortresses struggled for superiority. The Knoll changed hands four times. The entire region was a veritable tornado of exploding shells. Fighting continued, with the odds first on one side and then on the other, until early in the morning of Sept. 23, just before daybreak, the 54th Brigade, composed of the 107th and 108th Infantry, relieved what was left of the 106th and continued the struggle to retain the foothold secured on the three strong points and to gain the jumping off line fixed for the attack of the next day. At dawn on the 25th both American divisions attacked behind the heaviest barrage and continued to go forward, while the 27th Division was withdrawn in order that it might rest and reorganize. During this battle the 27th division took 17 German officers and 723 soldiers of other ranks, aside from a number of field pieces and innumerable guns. But the fighting was not of the character which makes it possible to take the number of prisoners which would indicate the fierceness of the struggle or the far reaching effects of the success attained. By mid-afternoon the division was in the line again. After ten days of pursuit the enemy had reached the line of the Selle River and was there prepared for a determined resistance.

"On the night of Oct. 13-14 Gen. O'Ryan's men composed six patrols to dominate no man's land, and on the



dence among the men in their own fighting ability. In late August the division moved into the front line, relieving the 4th and 41st British Divisions. At that time no man's land was dominated by the Germans, but

left a large number of dead and wounded on the field. As a consequence of this sample of the fighting qualities of the New Yorkers the enthusiasm of the Germans waned. Shortly thereafter information was received that the Ger-

man proposed to retire from Mount Kemmel and from the territory to the south. Upon the receipt of this information orders were promptly given to the division to attack Vier-

maux Ridge, Houdignoul Wood, Petit Bois and Plateau Farm. Many prisoners were taken, and a new line was established on favorable ground in place of the old line which for months had suffered under direct enemy observation.

"As soon as the division had accomplished its purpose it, together with the 30th Division, was withdrawn from Flanders and prepared for the battle which was destined to break the much vaunted Hindenburg line.

"The training of a division before it takes part in battle is intensive to an extreme. The 27th, in the vicinity of Doullens, manoeuvred and rehearsed many details which it was believed would arise, in preparation for the battle to come. The division was then moved by bus, train and motor through that desolated area in

which the warring nations have fought again and again.

"On their way to attack the Germans in their underground stronghold the men of the 27th passed Albert, merely a shell of its former self, and crossed the Somme where the banks are pitted with shell holes and strewn with rusted and broken pieces of the machinery of war.

"On the 26th of September the division took over from the British a sector 4,000 yards in width. The 30th American Division, on the right, occupied a similar front. The two divisions faced the great tunnel system of the Hindenburg line. The sector occupied by the New York troops was almost exactly midway between St. Quentin and Cambrai. If a straight line is drawn connecting these two cities, it will be found that the point of the wedge which was to be forced through what has been called the impregnable line of Hindenburg was just back of this connecting line at a town named Ronsoy. This—the point of the wedge—was the sector assigned to the 27th Division. At the time, however, the divisional front was from four to eight hundred yards back of the line occupied by the 30th Division. Orders were given to assault and capture this line of outer defenses.

"This defense system consisted of several lines of trenches protected by an elaborate system of wire supported by three fortified strong points known as the Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quenneville Farm. Picked German troops held these positions. The entire outer defensive system bristled with light and heavy machine guns, minenwerfers of various sizes, anti-tank guns and concealed field pieces. From the rear a vast amount of ammunition, well together by locality and sentiment, the pride of organization and a rigidity of discipline surpassed by no fighting unit in the American Army. They had had hard training for this crucial test. They were skilled in the use of their weapons, and now faced the Hindenburg defense system with no lack of confidence and no lack of courage. They believed that they could do what picked troops of the Allied armies had failed on numerous occasions to accomplish. They believed they could break the Hindenburg line.

"On the 26th of September the 106th Infantry and one battalion of the 108th

of the war. These divisions were supported by forty tanks, and the attack was synchronized with that of the British divisions on the right and left. This was the attack on the main Hindenburg line.

"The New Yorkers advanced despite incredible amounts of metal thrown into their midst by the enemy, and despite millions of machine gun bullets fired through the barrage, and despite the smoke, which was so thick that nothing could be seen. Enemy reserves who had been held in the tunnel carrying the St. Quentin Canal attacked fiercely on three sides, front, rear and flank, while a terrific counter attack was launched against the left flank of the division from Vendhuise in an effort to roll up this flank and crush the whole attack. One battalion of the 107th Infantry and one battalion of the 108th, with machine gun battalions, were put in to stem this counter attack, which had come unexpectedly from the left, where the British had been unable to come up. The counter attack was defeated and renewed. The fighting was as heavy as any during the war. But despite the odds elements of the division reached the main line and occupied part of the St. Quentin Canal. Some of the elements of the 107th Infantry, who greatly outnumbered and reduced to skeletons of their former selves, killed the support troops, while elements of the 108th held on, bombing dugouts and positions on the main defensive system and capturing more prisoners than their own strength. These they kept in subjection while they fought off a counter attack in one of the most sanguinary battles of the western front.

"When at last the division was relieved by the Australians a number of the men still refused to stop fighting and continued to go forward with their comrades in arms. The result of the battle is history. Not only the outlying defenses but the main system of the Hindenburg line was broken and the great German flank attack crushed and headed off.

"Through the break made by the American divisions the rest of the Fourth British Army pushed on